

Risk, gender and the real

Lacan for risk analysis

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Introduction

Few concepts encapsulate the depth and breadth of human experience like *risk*. The concept of risk plots a vast array of dimension in human experience: it reflects our experience of the past and our aspirations for the future, draws upon our own individual experience as well as the experience of others, it reflects what we know and necessarily delves into the unknown, it revolves around certainty uncertainty, and the very frontier between faith and reason. Risk is profoundly involved in the metaphysics of the unknown, in concern for the other-worldly. This can be clearly illustrated by a historical reconstruction of risk. From its first traces risk seems inseparable from religion, from Ancient Greece to the superstition of the Middle Ages, to the Enlightenment philosophers, and onward [2].

Risk is not only a physical necessity, that it derives from the reality of what we commonly call the ‘laws’ of nature.

Risk is an *ethical necessity*, that risk, both the concept of risk and the experience of risk as ethical is an unavoidable part of human self-understanding.

In advancing this argument I clearly link up with the long-standing debate about ‘objective’ and ‘subjective’ risk, about the role of culture and society in the determination and experience of risk.

Moreover, risk is inseparable from a certain question of *power*, of *mastery* and *submission*. The sciences of risk, from frivolousness of the pre-modern science, to the challenge of probability and statistical uncertainty, to the new sciences of risk management, all conceptualize risk as something to overcome, an experience whose time can and should be put to an end.

The study of risk has thus changed profoundly throughout time, distinctly following the historical evolution of our physical understanding of the world. The most insistently recurring theme in this history of risk is the history of an attempt to eliminate it, and by a vast array of men, from pragmatic to theological. Yet if the efforts to eliminate risk have varied, the need to take a human, and thus ethical, attitude toward it has been unchanging.

The purpose of this paper is twofold. First it will spell out four discourses in which the notions of risk and gender meet, interfere and raise questions and produce new understandings relative to our understanding of risk. Second, it will develop the basic concepts of Lacanian philosophy in order to pursue the main thrusts of these discourses through a Lacanian reading of the concept of *risk*. A fundamental, and fundamentally neglected, characteristic of risk is its *gendered* character. It will critique and eventually oppose the argument of mix and stir: (better science by adding gender), advancing instead the position that that risk—like science itself, is already deeply gendered and that our understanding of the somatic function of can be clearly seen through the lens of the Lacanian concept of the real.

1. Gender and the discourse of risk

Gender and science

Gender scholarship has many forms and many objects of inquiry. Most recently the epistemological status of the natural and social sciences has been the object of scrutiny from gender studies. The scholarship, like others of its kind, focuses on the tacit gender assumptions of its object, in this case the methodologies, paradigmatic assumptions and practices of science itself. The most basic starting point of a gender critique of science is the observation of the

degree to which a certain ideology of scientific objectivity has come to pervade our lives. Through a long history of intellectual development, scientific knowledge has become the ideal form of knowledge. Indeed it has become a common assumption in scholarly fields that knowledge which is not scientific knowledge is not knowledge at all. This stands in contrast to the considerable inflation of non-scientific paths to truth, the rise of religion, alternative forms of spirituality, etc.

The political, social ethical, historical premises of science have always been scrutinized quite critically. Thus the gender critique of science is not the first though for reasons that have yet to be analyzed it contains a variety of dimensions that invite exploration. As Sandra Harding has put it in *The Science Question in Feminism*, once we begin to theorize gender—to define gender as an analytic category within which humans think about and organize their social activity rather than as a natural consequence of sex difference, then a number of consequences for social scientific scholarship appear (Harding, 1986: 17). Harding and others have shown convincingly how not only the sociology of science but also the epistemology of the sciences has a gendered dimension that has not been brought to the surface for analysis. On the sociological level the analysis can consider inequalities in participation in science, and the *use* of sciences in the service of sexist or homophobic social projects. On the methodological level attention can be given to the question of the selection and definition of legitimate scientific problems. On the level of the epistemology of the sciences gender is a relevant issue for the question the pretence of value-neutral claims, as well as claims about how beliefs are grounded in social experiences which clearly possess a gender element. (Harding, 1986: 20-24; Peterson, 1992a; cf. Peterson, 1992b: 39).

These questions have been recently unpacked through a debate played out in the *International Studies Review* in 2004, primarily in a dialogue between J. Ann Tickner and Mary Caprioli about the role of gender in international relations theory. The debate revolves around the degree to which IR theory is necessarily quantitative or necessarily contains a quantitative component and, in as far as it might be quantitative, the degree to which it is incompatible with gender analysis (Caprioli, 2004). Two essential assumptions guide the discussion. First, it concerns the question of what if anything makes international relations 'scientific' and whether there is a basis for claiming that 'authentically' scientific IR studies can include quantitative or empirical dimensions. Second, it confronts the claim that that gender approaches are somehow by nature opposed to quantitative methods. Where Tickner by and large argues that gender studies is served by quantitative methods, Caprioli responds with a critique of the opposition between the 'empirical' or

‘positivist’ characterizations of gender studies and quantitative ones, reproaching feminists for creating a false dichotomy between ‘positivist’ and ‘interpretivist’ methodologies.

Risk as a kind of knowledge

Risk is a virtual, conditioned knowledge about what is to come, and thus about what we cannot know fully and completely. Risk is a relation to the future, but it is also a relationship to the past. But it is also a relation to the past and to all that the past provides us with in terms the indexes for prognosis about the future. It is a kind of knowledge growing out of a variety of experiences and a variety of a adjacent knowledge, only a part of which are adequately thematized by the assumptions, categories and tools of traditional epistemology.

To the degree that risk analysis in general can be assimilated to scientific methodologies like IR theory, an IR-based epistemological critique be applied to it. Risk is gendered in a variety of ways, only some of which are taken up by gender studies within IR. To the degree that it is couched in a more or less implicit understanding of social experience, risk is shaped by the channels of gender social power. Yet, as we will try to show by resorting to a Lacanian philosophical approach, the sexualized psychic mechanisms involved in our relationship to our selves and to others, will shape and otherwise effect the very constitution of risk.

First and foremost, risk is a kind *knowledge about the future*. It is a knowledge of the future, doubtless characterized by lower certitude than knowledge about the past. Yet it is in no sense complete ignorance or some form of non-knowledge, just as knowledge about the past can never be entirely complete. (1) Risk is thus in part the purely epistemological aspect or status of the knowledge we do not entirely know. (2) Risk is also a kind of knowledge about the *status* of knowledge of the future. The strength of knowledge about the future, its likelihood. In more actuarial conceptualizations of risk, this measure is quantified as *probability*, as the numerical likelihood of any one given proposition being true. (3) Engrained in this epistemological dimension of risk is a certain *pathos* of the experience of incomplete knowledge, the frustration, fear, or anguish of incomplete knowledge. Knowledge about incomplete or absent knowledge, meta-knowledge, is the very definition of *pathos*. The limitation of *probability* or *likelihood* as a measure and expression of the status of knowledge about the future is that it evaluates only one proposition at a time, expresses only one binary measure of a vastly composite, poignant, complex of experiences.

Second, risk is knowledge about the past. The gap between authentic knowledge of the future and insights or correlations about what the future *could* be or, in the case of actuarial logic, what its quantitative probability is, has no other source than the past. Strictly speaking the past of the future, which is, as we know, not by any means always the present.

Third, if there is actual knowledge of the past, empirical or otherwise, that is associated with experience of the past then there must be meta-knowledge concerning the associability of past knowledge with the future. Knowledge of the past lends itself unequally to gaining insight or knowledge of the future. The salience of past knowledge to the future is again the product of a certain analysis. This is an other order of risk-knowledge. It is knowledge about the relation between knowledge about the past and knowledge about the future.

Fourth, the correlation of knowledge of the past with knowledge about the future varies according to robustness or likelihood of knowledge about the future. The assertion *that* knowledge about the past has a link with knowledge about the future is one thing. Knowledge about the character of that connection and, in particular about its robustness is still another

These four dimensions of knowledge, relates to knowledge and knowledge about knowledge in ways that ordinary epistemology neglects or excludes. These include variations in scope and breath of knowledge, robustness, salience and dependency on the human attchemaen to knowledge. Knowledge in general, and risk-knowledge in particular, is indistinguishable from the human, subjective, spiritual and above corporal experience of knowledge, of the thought of its origin. These are the programme of gender analysis.

Risk and the unified subject that gender critique problematizes.

The *subject* of risk is therefore the subject of a particular kind of knowledge. It is a knowledge out of kilter relative to what we ordinarily consider to the Cartesian certitude of knowledge: surety, centeredness of the subject in relation the horizon of experience: world and other subjects. Risk-knowledge burdened with the subjective intra-human burden of all that is non-knowledge. Risk implies a link to epi-knowledge. It is anti-epistemology. Risk like gender is, at its most fundamental level a problematization of subjectivity. It has, to cite take a cue from Jabri, we can see gender as a certain set of questions about what it means to be centred, to be self-present. Gender as a means (one among many others) of opening the self to relations with others, and including those others in one's experience of and understanding of the self. To cite Jabri,

‘Gender has less to do with sex and sexuality than it does with a fundamental imbalance in the subject, in the position of the subject. It may very well have to do with desire, which from the Hegelian point of view [...] is linked with the identity itself, with the recognition of others, etc.’ (Jabri, 1999: 45).

The conventional subject of risk is *centred* and *non-gendered*. The moral the epistemological foundation of that subject, the basis for knowing, for making judgments about the world, is at best un-nuanced with regard to a gendered experience of reality consciousness, at worst directly implicated in derailing an authentic experience of the world.

In a similar vein, the notion of *agency*, the modalities of action stemming from a combination of will and rationality—is closely tied to a presumption of non-gendered unity of the subject.

Risk and gendered identity

The identity of the subject in most of the risk literature is presumes uncritically a number characteristics. Most prominently it presumes the *homogeneity* of the subject ‘I’; it presumes the *autonomy* of the subject ‘I’; it presumes the *power-neutrality* of the subject ‘I’; and it presumes the *normative neutrality* of the subject ‘I’. None of these neutralities or value-free positions is unproblematic. Gender analysis underscores the notion, as do several types of analysis, that the subject, its values, sovereignty, power and normative position varies according to context: time, space, ideological situation

When Judith Butler, in her most recently collection of essays, refers to ‘undoing gender’, she does not express a sovereign subject undertaking a dismantling of gender. It is the *genitus objectus*, gender is something which undoes us. Or, to press the post-structuralist timber of the notion: by dismantling gender we are undone:

If I am someone who cannot be without doing, then the conditions of my doing are, in part, the conditions of my existence. If my doing is dependent on what is done to me or, rather, the ways in which I am done by norms, then the possibility of my persistence as an ‘I’ depends upon my being able to do something with what is done with me. [...] As a result, the ‘I’ that I am finds itself at once constituted by norms and dependent on them but also endeavours to live in ways that maintain a critical and transformative relation to them (Butler, 2004b: 3).

The identity of the subject, be it the subject of risk or risk assessment, is determined (‘done’) by the socially established norms and values which surround him/her.

Risk and the (gendered) body

Gender studies have long focused on the body as dimension more or less completely neglected by Western tradition as a participant in the experience of the world. A long and noble philosophical tradition from Platonism, to through Christianity to Cartesianism grants to the body only a secondary role. This is all the paradoxical in fields of study concerned with various forms of physical violence, such as risk theory. It is indeed the body that suffers the violence of realized threat. It is the body that is vulnerable, that suffers insecurity. The mind, soul, spirit, intellect, etc. suffer the anguish of anticipation. Or one could say that mind experiences risk, the body experiences the violence. For Judith Butler:

The body implies mortality, vulnerability, agency: the skin and the flesh expose us to the gaze of others but also to touch and to violence. The body and be the agency and instrument of all these as well, or the site where 'doing' and 'being done to' become equivocal. Although we struggle for rights over our own bodies, the very bodies for which we struggle are not quite ever only our own. The body has its invariably public dimension; constitute as a social phenomenon in the public sphere, my body is an is not mine (Butler, 2004a: 21).

Butler's understanding of the body supports the notion that gender is at the core of the very precarity of life. Butler further develops this notion in a complex argument in an essay entitled 'Violence, Mourning, Politics' on 9/11, HIV/AIDS and the phenomenon of mourning in general:

...each of us is constituted politically in part by virtue of the social vulnerability of our bodies—as a site of desire and physical vulnerability, as a site of a publicity at once assertive and exposed. Loss and vulnerability seem to follow from our being socially constituted bodies, attached to others, at risk of losing those attachments, exposed to others, at risk of violence by virtue of that exposure (Butler, 2004b: 20).

The gender approach to risk theory and risk analysis thus brings with it the awareness that *bodily fragility, precariousness* is at the heart of being human and of the experience of that humanity.

2. Risk and the desire for certainty

Risk is a desire for knowledge

The first part of this article has situated the problem of risk within 4 social scientific modes of discourse. It has reproduced with a moderate critique the theoretical gender issues such as they are deployed in the analysis of international relations. The four components presented and discussed in part I of the paper, (1) epistemological assumptions of social science, (2) questioned the status of the subject, (3) situated risk analysis as dependent upon gender and (4) opened the analysis of risk to the question of the body. These are the first-order links to the epistemology of

the social sciences and at the same time the basic components of Lacanian psychoanalysis. The provisional conclusion of the first part of this article, and its examination of risk through theories sensitive to gender, is that risk as a concept and risk analysis as a methodology should be opened, nuanced and fundamentally problematized. The second part of this article will attempt to open up the subjectivity of risk itself, questioning risk-knowledge as an effect of the risk-subject, itself fundamentally gendered, now in terms of the intimate, sexualized relation between the subject and itself. In this section we will attempt to link the development of the concept of risk directly with Lacan's theory.

Security, insecurity, uncertainty and risk

Security, as Dillon has pointed out, exploits a number of different alliances with *knowledge* (Dillon, 1996: 17). The early revelation that premises of the Iraq war were by and large fictional underscores the notion that political packaging of security as a tool of governance is essentially depend on what is known about threats and more importantly *who* knows them. The governance of knowledge is an essential tool for the governance of people.

Security is a kind of knowledge, and yet insecurity does not adequately break down within the scope of the epistemology of security studies or international relations. This is because security knowledge is the axis of production of number of pathologies. (Daase & Kessler, 2006). The search for security generates a self-replicating need for security and thereby knowledge for security. We can not be secure in our knowledge unless it is total and global. More knowledge brings with it knowledge of the limits of knowledge which in turn produces more insecurity. The more transparent we render our lives in the name of security, the more border controls, bag-checks and metal detectors we confront, the *less* secure we feel, and pragmatically the less secure society is in pragmatic turns.

The fascination with prophylactic security, which has lead to a new wave of concentrated security industrialization channelled through a renewed faith in the redemptive potential of technology what might even seem to be a Third Modern to Beck's Second Modern (Beck, 1989; Beck & Bons, 2001; Beck & Lau, 2004), has clearly lead to a production or re-production of *insecurity* in social registers that resist the instrumental approaches to public safety. This grows out of a distinct conceptual shift from the multilevel challenge of *security* and the revitalization of the notion of *safety*. Thus in the conclusion to his book *Community* (2001), Zygmunt Bauman affirms:

...you hear little about 'existential insecurity' or 'ontological insecurity'. Instead, you hear a lot and from everywhere about the threats to the safety of streets, homes and bodies, and what you hear about them seems to chime well with your own daily experience, with the things you see with your eyes. The demand to cleanse the food we eat from harmful and potentially lethal ingredients and the demand to clear the streets we walk of inscrutable and potentially lethal strangers are the ones most commonly heard when the ways to improve our lives are talked about, and also the ones that feel more credible, indeed self-evident, than any other. Acting in a way that contradicts these demands is what we are most eager to classify as crime and want to be punished, the more severely the better. (Bauman, 2001)

Bauman's observation builds upon a distinction between *safety* and *security*. The concern for *safety*, which Bauman illustrates with a number of examples, refers to *objective* danger. Safety is a protection from danger which *already* exists, which is observable, identifiable, conceptualizable, but which has not yet touched us. *Security*, on the other hand, implies the human pathos of our relation to the unknown. It is thus both a reference to the world of possibilities and a self-reference, a reference to the humanity which lies at the basis of the experience of danger that is *not yet* identified, articulated or conceptualized. Security is in this way *self-reflective*, it is constitutive of the self.

To construe security as *certitude* calls upon the deep history of the concept. The concept of security itself grows out of a complex history, which, *priori* to its considerable intensification in the cold war discourse of *national security* carried far more of a moral and theological character (Brunner, *et al.*, 1972: 831-862; Wæver, 2005). As late as the close of the 19th century, 'security' was commonly used to refer both to epistemological certitude and as moral complaisance, in particular with respect to Christian virtues and ones faith in God (Burchfield, 1971).

The fundamental difference between security and safety is the ethical pathos that inhabits the former. Likewise, the answer to concerns about safety is law enforcement, the instrumental application of rules and regulations that respond to the objective materiality of danger. What is the answer to insecurity? Security is in this sense ethics, not understood as a set of guidelines or rules for assuring safety, but as opening of the self in the field between *subjective* security and *objective* security, between security as an experience of feeling safe, stable and free from fear and anxiety, and security as a state factually free from threat.

Pure nature and the risk that remains

The concept of risk is a response to our desire to know about and understand the future. Risk is beyond planning, it has a transformational function, making liveable danger that is otherwise

intolerable, either in some a strong existential sense or in an instrumental cost-benefit logic. Yet complete knowledge about what will happen in the future corresponds to society's apparently inexhaustible need for security. This need, security, is increasingly construed as *predictability*, and grows out of the early modern assumption that such knowledge is indeed entirely possible. The original function or risk analysis is to satisfy the modernity's fantasy of knowledge. Risk is the analytic tool that provides a kind epistemological balm, artificial security for a body politic cramped with insecurity.

Risk operates as a deconstruction of the opposition between the human life-world (in the Luhmanian sense) and nature. It is a continuous and variable index of the humanity of nature and the nature of humanity. On the one hand it refers to the degree of humanness in nature, the degree to which the human values are projected onto nature, in order to de-limit the non-human, identify it as a threat to humans. On the other hand it is the continuous reminder of the nature in us. In short, that the danger, the threat to us is in some sense already here, that the otherness of nature is not to be found *out there*, but rather is rather already part of us.

If there exists anything like 'pure nature' then it is clearly exhausted by risk analysis, entirely encapsulated in the calculus of risk analysis and risk management. Supposing that 'purely' natural dangers indeed exist than they are immediately exhausted by risk analysis, transformed into a conceptualizable cost, internalized and assimilated into the governance of human activity. In other words 'purely natural' risk is not risk at all, it is always already transformed into the logic of the human contingency.

The 'authentic' danger (which may indeed not exist, but whose conceptualization we cannot avoid here) is that which cannot be assimilated, cannot be entirely internalized into the conventional calculus of risk. It is danger in purgatory, danger that cannot reduced to the calculus of risk. The subject of the calculus of risk cannot entirely grasp this danger, cannot know where it starts, and where it ends. Attempts to govern take the form of a struggle to distinguish the 'natural facts' from the human ones, to quantify or instrumentalize the 'subjective' side of risk and 'objectify' it to the greatest extent possible. Objectifiable risk, governable, as we said, dissolves from the risk horizon. The risk that remains is the risk that resists this process, risk that cannot be assimilated or governed, cannot be objectified, cannot become an object in any simple sense of the world.

Certitude and the subject of risk

The objective security, which is the aim of risk management, is in this sense not a simply epistemological order. Though it must be epistemological construed as certainty, it lies in a field or constellation of fears, desires, fantasies, impressions, suspicions and suppositions. The challenge both for understanding risk and for managing it is to articulate a concept that comprehending these heterogeneous elements. The Lacanian grid of *Symbolic*, *Imaginary* and *Real* serves this aim, and makes a considerable step toward pulling together the otherwise incommensurate elements of risk.

In his 1964 discussion of the subject of the unconscious in Freud's *Interpretation of Dreams* Jacques Lacan turns to Freud's interest for the dynamics of the forgetting of dreams, their distortion and the particular way they are transmitted by the subject. 'The major term in Freud's analysis, he asserts, is not 'truth', but rather 'certitude' or 'certainty' (*certitude/Gewissheit*). Freud's project is Cartesian, Lacan continues,

in the sense that it builds upon the subject of certainty. It concerns that about which one can be certain. To this end, the first thing to do is to overcome what connotes anything about the unconscious, especially when it has to do with making it merge from the dream experience, to surmount what floats about ubiquitously, what punctuates, what blurs, what blotches the text of any dream communication: I am not sure, I doubt. (Lacan & Miller, 1973: 36)

The complex drives of human subjectivity have in common with the notion of risk that they relay the uncertain, the unclear, the partially articulated, the distorted, the indistinct or undecided. These 'epistemological' categories, while relating to the most common of daily experiences, resist or derail the analyses of conventional epistemology. They are the essence of risk and yet they are not 'real' knowledge. They occupy an in-between place, between what we know, what we do not know, what we wish to know, what we struggle to know. Conventional epistemology can at best stretch itself to cover what we *cannot* know. It fails to fuse the unavoidable link between a certain unknown knowledge and the ambition and struggle to know it. The unknown, in the grid of risk-experience, is never purely unknown. It is tainted and conditioned by the knowledge of the unknown, and thus by an impulse to uncover the knowledge that by some pre-knowledge or para-knowledge we know or suspect lies in wait. Risk-knowledge is a kind of contract, a promise of 'real' knowledge, a reward for those who would seek, a compensation for curiosity, courage, audacity, tenacity, etc.. Who or what is the subject of this promise? Lacan's philosophy of the subject proposes the shape of an answer.

Risk-knowledge as somatic knowledge of the Real

Alain Badiou has described our century as one obsessed with the Real. This ‘obsession’ has been thematized by both Badiou himself and in a number of variations by Žižek, whose entire work might be said to be guided by the notion. Popular culture in the American idiom has also made ‘the real’ a central expression. ‘Be real’, ‘get real’, the ‘real thing’, the ‘real story’, or just simply ‘it was real’ attempt to reach beyond the ontological reach of the term, the indication that something factually belongs to the set of things that possess the property of existence, and toward the expression of some more intense kind of authenticity, perfection or presence.

Lacan’s theory of the subject is interpreted through the lens of the triad of orders: *Symbolic*, *Imaginary*, *Real*.

The order of the Imaginary

An analysis in Lacanian terms must necessarily be concerned with the *subject* of risk, that is with the position from which risk is perceived, and registered as knowledge about the unknown, and acted upon. Because of the particular process of evolution of the subject, from infancy, through childhood and on, the subject is characterized by a fundamental lack. In a number of contexts Lacan refers to this lack as a ‘lack of being’, both a fundamental incompleteness or lack of unity, in the subject and its relation to the world, but also the presumption, logic prerequisite of lack, of a prior or potential unity. This lack of unity is not simply contingent however, it is constitutive of the subject. The subject *is* precisely that which lives the experience of lack. This fact and this experience are what make the subject what it is. The unity in question is the simple sense of the word ‘*Imaginary*’. The ‘order of the *Imaginary*’ however is the field on which the subject struggles to re-establish the lost unity. To the degree it is a normative space, searching to carry out what is not, it is a profoundly ethical moment.

The order of the *Imaginary* can in this sense be seen as one of the organization elements of risk analysis and management. The lack to which it aspires is the complete, unified and fully constituted certainty about the dangers faced by the subject of risk. The *Imaginary* is the field of analysis and action in the attempt to establish, or re-establish, objective security, the *Imaginary* unity of safety and protection.

The order of the Symbolic

For Lacan the unconscious is a set of signifying materials, it is a process of signifying, of expression of meaning, that is beyond our control. When Lacan pronounces in 1957 that ‘the unconscious is structured like a language’ he is referring to the fact that analysis can communicate and understand the content of the conscious, but cannot regulate or govern it.

The symbolic is the set of rules, be they grammatical, social, or culture that limit and channel human expressions in the world. The finite set of possibilities for thinking and acting in the world. What are the recognizable, thinkable, and conceptualizable parameters that contribute to forming the dangers, insecurities and risks in our experience of life. These rules, unlike the *real*, to which we return in a moment, are to some extent available to us, though they cannot be altered consciously. Our possibilities for grasping risk, that is, for understanding it and formulating ways to approach it and deal with it are thus limited by the symbolic order. The fantasy of obtaining objective security in the world is closely linked to our dependence on this order of framing limitations. Nonetheless the *objective security* that is the *aim* of risk management and thus all thinking about risk is only partly related to these limitations. The source of fear and fascination also precedes and transcends the framing of socially based rules. It is pre-determined by another order of reality, the reality of that catastrophe that penetrates even the most robust sense of security. This is the order that Lacan calls the *Real*.

The order of the Real

The *Real* in Lacanian theory passes through a number of phases in the course of Lacan’s teaching. In his earliest writings the ‘*Real*’ is simply and directly opposed to the ‘image’ (1936) (Lacan, 1966: 75). Beginning in the 1950’s he uses the term in sense inspired by the Hegelian edict that ‘everything which is *Real* is rational’, integrating it into his theory of the three ‘orders’, together with the *Symbolic* and the *Imaginary* (Lacan, 1988). The primary characteristic of the *Real* in these writings is that, in opposition to the symbolic order distinguished by a set of discrete, elemental signifiers, it is perfectly undifferentiated. The *Real* is outside language and inaccessible to signification or representation. The *Real* is both unknowable and in some sense rational. Yet the *Real* reaches beyond the simple epistemological quandary of Kant’s thing-in-itself and metaphysical premises of the Hegel’s notion of Absolute Knowledge. The *real* is the experience of the risk fulfilment. Risk is the uncertainty of a certainty. The *real* is the unavoidable thought and somatic experience of that uncertainty, the fulfilment of the desire to know it and experience.

of that certainty partial erasure, a weighted certainty of certainty. The certainty of the danger to which

In Lacanian terminology risk is the *object-petit a*, the desire-cause of risk. It is the index, the sign, the tip or suspicion that causes us to seek to know. the *object-petit a* open our eyes, alerts our authorities, the services of protection, sets in motion the wheels of investigation, intelligence. *Object petit-a* establishes the order of securitization, tells us what to look out for.

Yet the paradoxical logic of risk that it cannot be entirely knowable, analyzable, cognizable or masterable in pure terms of risk. Risk presupposes the impossibility of knowing. What is more, we know it. We know that it is unknowable, and that knowledge, combined with some paradoxical—or more likely, self-contradictory—rationalization of the knowledge of the unknowable. If risk-knowledge, if the strategy or method for knowing it, the logic of its knowability, were fully available, it would not be risk at all, but rather a matter of safety.

Risk is much more a relationship to the desire for the catastrophe, the unthinkable. It is the fulfilment of risk. It is risk a fully unfolded reality. It is the playing out of the fantasy of of the of possible certainty. It is the certainty which leads us in our desire for security. It is the risk that creates and nourishes both the trepidation that powers risk-politics and the the objective security which is the false backdrop for it.

The lack of being

The lack of being constitutive of the subject of risk is essential the lack of objective security. This lack can be reduced, minimalized, and this would be the aim of risk analysis. But the very existence and nature of the subject of risk, according to this Lacanian interpretation, is not reducible in any comprehensive way to objective security.

This is because the order of the *Symbolic*, what Lacan calls the ‘Other’, cannot be entirely assimilated to the subject. It is always otherly, always foreign, never masterable or instrumentalizable. In terms of risk, the *Symbolic*, analytic or linguistic tools we possess in order to externalize risk, to seize it in the process of risk analysis or risk communication and thereby systematize and rationalize it are never adequate to it. An irreducible part of the risk still remains unconscious in the subject of risk. As individuals and collectively we can never entirely grasp that social or symbolic totality that constitutes the sum of our universe. On the other hand, that

totality structures the subject of risk. This is the fundamental a-symmetry of risk analysis and risk management.

Fantasy

The *Real* then is always necessarily beyond the reach of the subject. The fundamental lack in the subject is caused by its inability to adequately access the symbolic order, to give fully express to the unconscious or, in terms of the subject of risk, to fully articulate an understanding of the meaning of risk, its connection to the values of culture and society, its potential consequences, and its relation to fear, hope and aspiration. This lack itself is again the *objet petit-a*. It corresponds here to the lack in our ability to express and systematize risk, arising from the inner desire to do so. It is the source of the necessary illusion that we can indeed re-establish the rational unity necessary to fully bring objective security. The *objet petit-a* is the perceived *objective insecurity* caused by risk. It produces both the desire to seek the adequate analysis of risk and its causes in order to render them transparent, and assures that such adequation will not take place. It is not risk itself

Finally, *fantasy* is in Lacan's system the name of the scene where the subject would be in identity with the order of the symbolic and where the subject would have access to the *Real*. It is the function of *fantasy* is to give the subject the means to sustain the illusion of unity, of the fullness of the *Real* and of full objective security.

3. Moving on: The next steps in the analysis

This section will explore three ways of construing risk as gendered knowledge: First as performative in the meaning used by Judith Butler, secondly as embodied language in the sense used by Foucault, and as a reference to the *Real* understood in Lacanian theory of psychoanalysis, updated by his critics, Žižek, and others.

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